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ABSTRACT

A description is provided of the development, implementation, operation, and outcomes of the Santa Monica College Scholars Program, a partnership of six colleges and universities assisting students with demonstrated academic achievement to accomplish their goal of earning a baccalaureate degree. First, introductory material highlights selected program features, including: (1) guaranteed admission to any participating university; (2) a mandatory core curriculum with restricted enrollment; (3) discussions among faculty from each participating institution regarding curriculum content and rigor; and (4) a special support network for program participants. After delineating the purpose and objectives of the Scholars Program, the paper describes the following program features: student entrance and maintenance requirements; core curriculum; services to students provided by the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) and Santa Monica College; and interinstitutional activities. The steps in the implementation of the program are outlined, including determining program management, establishing the curriculum, developing brochures, recruiting and enrolling students, conducting a reception for students, and coordinating services and articulation with partner colleges. The next section looks at the results of the program, focusing on student characteristics and the qualitative assessments provided by participating students and faculty. Finally, program characteristics that make the Scholars Program a model for future efforts to strengthen postsecondary education are highlighted. (AYC)

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ENRICHING THE TRANSFER EFFORT

The Santa Monica College Scholars Program

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The Santa Monica College Scholars Program

The Scholars Program at Santa Monica College is a partnership of six colleges and universities assisting students with demonstrated academic achievement to accomplish their goal of a baccalaureate degree. Some of the selected program features are:

- Guaranteed priority admission to any of the participating universities for Santa Monica College students who successfully complete the program;
- Mandatory core curriculum at Santa Monica College with enrollment in these classes restricted to students in the Scholars Program;
- Faculty-to-faculty discipline discussions with all partnership institutions regarding core curriculum course content and rigor;
- Support network for Scholars students at Santa Monica College that includes a special academic adviser, peer advisers, student participation in guest lectures and seminars, special facility privileges and priority registration;
- University involvement for Scholars students while at Santa Monica College including university library privileges, enrollment in selected university courses, access to special university support services and tickets to selected university athletic and cultural events;
- Coordinated planning of the Scholars Program involving officials from all six of the partnership colleges and universities.

INTENTION

Santa Monica College has historically demonstrated a sincere commitment to the transfer function of the California Community Colleges and has enjoyed a tradition of excellence in transfer education. The reputation of the college is primarily derived from the number of transfer students and the performance of those students at the University of California. Santa Monica College is one of the leading transfer institutions to the UC system in the state of California. The college provides more transfer students to UCLA than any other community college. More specifically, approximately one-third of all community college transfers to UCLA from Los Angeles County come from Santa Monica College. Furthermore, recent data indicates that these students earn a median GPA of approximately 3.0 during their first year of work at UCLA.

The recounting of Santa Monica College's transfer success is not to seek praise but rather to portray the environment from which the Scholars Program emerged. The purpose of creating the Scholars Program was to embellish a successful transfer program, not an attempt to salvage the transfer effort. From the outset, the Scholars Program was designed as an augmentation to the college's transfer effort, not a replacement for the existing transfer program.

The Scholars Program was developed with the following five specific hopes:

1. Even though the performance upon transfer of Santa Monica College students is excellent, the college felt there was still room for improvement. The hope is that by offering the Scholars Program to a group of students with some degree of demonstrated academic achievement, these students will perform in their junior year at a level superior to native students at the transfer institution.

2. Even though Santa Monica College already transfers many students to four-year institutions, the college felt the number should be higher. The hope is that the Scholars Program will result in a new population of transfer students from Santa Monica College, not simply a diversion of our regular transfer students. In particular, the college hopes that the Scholars Program will increase the number of transfer students from two populations—students who have academic success but do not transfer even though a baccalaureate degree is their goal, and students with characteristics that are currently underrepresented in four-year institutions.

3. While Santa Monica College receives many excellent students, the college wanted to attract more academic achievers who have the option of attending a four-year institution directly from high school. The college has always believed that it provides a superior lower division experience for a student because of the high quality of faculty, relatively small class size, and the college's concentration on lower division education. However, the college needed a program with tangible benefits to attract academic achievers with postsecondary options. The hope is that the Scholars Program will provide the necessary benefits to make Santa Monica College the first choice among these students, not the second or third choice.

4. Even though Santa Monica College has a collection of honors courses, the college wanted to provide an alternative for academic achievers. The Scholars Program is not an honors program—it is a core curriculum program in which the core focuses on entry level, general education subjects. It is the hope that the Scholars Program will supplement the honors courses for those students with dual eligibility. It is also the hope that the Scholars Program will have a broad enough appeal to avoid the student interest oscillations and voluntary student attrition that have classically plagued honors programs.

5. While Santa Monica College has experienced excellent relationships with neighboring four-year institutions, the college wanted to raise those relationships to a new level of cooperation. In the past, the institutions have tended to operate as cooperative but discrete, independent units. It is the hope that the Scholars Program will be the beginning of a working partnership between all postsecondary institutions for the enhancement of lower division education.

DESCRIPTION

The development of the Scholars Program began in Spring, 1984, through a dialogue between the Administrative Dean of Instruction at Santa Monica College and the Dean of Academic Interinstitutional Programs at UCLA. The discussions led to the creation of a concept paper by Santa Monica College. By the beginning of 1985, and after the involvement of numerous people at both institutions (particularly the individual now serving as the Director of the TAP Program at UCLA), the concept was agreed to by both institutions.

The current concept of the program has the following four significant elements:

1. Student Requirements
   a. Entrance requirements. A student must have a minimum high school grade point average of 3.0 in academic courses, if entering directly from high school. Students who do not meet that requirement or have transferred to Santa Monica College are eligible for admission to the program after completing at least 24 units of UC baccalaureate-level courses with an accumulative 3.0 grade point average.
   b. Maintenance requirements. To retain active status in the Scholars Program, students must:
      (1) Maintain a 3.0 overall GPA in all baccalaureate coursework;
      (2) Carry a minimum of 12 units each semester; and
      (3) Complete one designated Scholars section course in each of six core curriculum categories if entering the program as a freshman. Complete courses in six categories, if possible, and no fewer than four categories if entering the program as a continuing student.
2. Core Curriculum
   a. General. Enrollment in all Scholars courses in the core curiculum is restricted to students in the Scholars Program.
   b. Categories. The six categories within the core curriculum are:
      (1) English composition
      (2) Physical science
      (3) Life science
      (4) Historical analysis
      (5) Social analysis
      (6) Literature
   c. A feature of the core curriculum is a writing-across-the-curriculum program.

3. Services to Students
   a. Services from UCLA
      (1) Guaranteed priority admission to the College of Letters and Science to those students who successfully complete the program (all lower division requirements and Scholars Program requirements)
      (2) Eligibility to enroll in regular UCLA courses through University Extension
      (3) UCLA lecturers
      (4) UCLA library privileges
      (5) UCLA student mentors who are SMC alumni
      (6) Special orientation sessions at UCLA
      (7) Eligibility to participate in UCLA counseling workshops
      (8) Tickets to selected UCLA athletic and cultural events
   b. Services from Santa Monica College
      (1) Priority registration
      (2) Special academic advising
      (3) A core curriculum with other Scholars students
      (4) ELigibility to participate in special faculty and guest lecturer seminars
      (5) Special, restricted library study facilities
      (6) Assistance in applying for financial aid and on-campus employment
      (7) The designation of SMC-UCLA Scholar on SMC transcript after successfully completing the program
4. Interinstitutional Activities
   a. Discipline discussions between faculties from both institutions, including the appropriate level of rigor for the core curriculum and course articulation in general.
   b. Instructor exchanges within the core curriculum and/or the basic proficiencies.
   c. SMC faculty participation in UCLA seminars and summer institutes.
   d. Access to UCLA's diagnostic testing service in mathematics.
   e. Counseling workshops between counselors and advisors at both institutions.
   f. Reference to the Scholars Program by UCLA in their redirect letters.
   g. Provision of a mailing list to Santa Monica College for all UCLA redirects residing in close proximity to SMC.
   h. Joint research projects to examine the transfer performance of Santa Monica College students.

Once the agreement was in place with UCLA, the college felt that similar agreements needed to be established with other major transfer institutions. Many of the college's transfer students choose institutions other than UCLA and the intent of the program was not to exclusively direct Scholars students to one institution. In many majors, this is a necessity because the major is not offered at UCLA. While the college transfers students to different CSU campuses, the largest number attend CSU Northridge. Therefore, Santa Monica College sought out CSUN as the next partner in the Scholars Program.

Through the efforts of the Associate Vice President of Academic Affairs and the Coordinator of Academic Programs at CSUN, an agreement similar to the one with UCLA was reached with CSUN. However, the CSUN agreement goes one step further by providing not only guaranteed admission to CSUN, but also guaranteed admission to the School of Business Administration and Economics (an impacted program). This additional guarantee was possible because of the efforts of the Acting Dean of the School of Business Administration at CSUN.

Santa Monica College felt at this point they had a viable partnership and sufficient agreements for the Scholars Program. However, given the goals of the program, the partnership would not be complete until neighboring private postsecondary institutions were included. Therefore, more limited agreements were then sought from Loyola-Marymount University, Pepperdine University, and the University of Southern California. In each case, the agreement requested two features: (1) guaranteed admission for students successfully completing the program (excluding impacted majors), and (2) special academic counseling while the student was in the Scholars Program at Santa Monica College. Fortunately, through the efforts of the Dean of Admissions and Academic Vice President at Loyola-Marymount University, the Dean of Admissions and the Vice Chancellor at Pepperdine, and the Director of Admissions and Vice President of Letters, Arts and Science at USC, agreements were reached with all three universities in the spring of 1985.

With the five agreements, Santa Monica College now had the foundation to build a special program which could accomplish the defined goals for the Scholars Program. In particular, the college could offer high school academic achievers tangible benefits for attending Santa Monica College; and all proximate postsecondary institutions (public and private) had been brought into a single partnership. Now, the college had to implement the program in a manner appropriate to satisfy all of the college's stated hopes.

One last element was still needed prior to complete implementation: to be selected as a Transfer Center by the California Community College Chancellor's Office. Through a successful application to designate Santa Monica College as a Transfer Center, the college received the financial support to administer the student services aspect of the Scholars Program, and to develop three other important embellishments of our transfer program: (1) the development of a special program for high potential, underrepresented students, (2) the development of an integrated, computerized transfer support system which provides all transfer goal students with individual communications, and (3) the investigation of expanding the Scholars Program to a 2 + 2 + 2 program with local high schools.

IMPLEMENTATION

The implementation of a program such as the Scholars Program involves extensive collaboration between faculty and administration; and numerous detailed actions on the part of the institutions. A list of these detailed actions would be outside the scope of this report, so the activities prior to the start of the program have been distilled and a list of the highlights is presented below.

1. Determine the management of the program. The management of the Scholars Program is split equally between two positions: instructional management by the Coordinator of the Scholars Program (English faculty member with 30 percent release assignment) and student services management by the Coordinator of the Transfer Center.
2. Establish the Fall, 1985 curriculum offering:
   a. Set the core curriculum.
   b. Select the core curriculum faculty.
   c. Begin the faculty-to-faculty discussions with partner universities.
3. Develop brochures describing the Scholars Program.
4. Recruit students
   a. Describe the program to feeder high school principals and counselors.
   b. Describe the program in high school orientation sessions.
   c. Describe the program in all SMC English 1 classes.
   d. Describe the program in the SMC newspaper and local newspapers.
   e. Send a three-part mailing to local, eligible UCLA redirect students.
   f. Send a three-part mailing to eligible, local high school seniors that are not UCLA redirects.
   g. Send a mailing to eligible SMC continuing students.
5. Enroll interested students.
   a. Provide small, restricted orientation sessions.
   b. Provide necessary math and English assessment tests.
   c. Provide individual counseling sessions with the Scholars Program counselor.
   d. Enroll Scholars students in all classes at the beginning of the registration period.
   e. Monitor all program changes by Scholars students.
6. Conduct a Presidential reception for the students to recognize the student acceptance into the program and to provide retention of students between the date of enrollment and the beginning of classes.
7. Orchestrate the implementation of coordinated services and articulation with partner universities.

RESULTS

The Scholars Program was designed to accept a maximum of 125 students in the inaugural class for Fall, 1985. Due to exceptional student interest, the program began the Fall semester with that maximum—125 students. Since it became apparent that the program would reach its maximum capacity, eligible applicants were accepted on a first-come, first-served basis.

The characteristics of the initial Scholars Program are as follows:

1. The students were unevenly distributed in terms of source.
   a. Continuing students (34%)
   b. UCLA redirects (48%)
   c. Other high school seniors (18%)

2. While the total ethnic minority participation mirrored the general college student body, the distribution among these ethnic minorities in the program did not reflect the distribution in the general college population.
   a. The student participation in the Scholars Program includes 31% ethnic minorities as compared to 33% in the general student body.
   b. Asian and American Indian participation is at twice the rate of the general student body, while Hispanic participation is at one-half the rate and Black participation is at one-third the rate of the general student body.

3. Approximately three-fourths of the students in the program indicated on entry that they were destined for UCLA, while the remaining one-fourth were fairly evenly distributed among the other partner universities.

4. The majority (56%) of Scholars students are employed more than five hours per week. The median level of outside employment among these students is in the 15-20 hour per week range with the maximum being 35 hours per week.

5. As of the second census in the first semester, there has been approximately a five percent attrition from the program. The withdrawals were due to personal reasons or academic difficulty, not disenchantment with the program. Obviously, the attrition rates due to academic difficulty will be a greater issue after the completion of the first semsester.

6. Due to the embryonic stage of the program, specific performance data is not yet available.

In addition to the aforementioned data, there are a number of qualitative assessments about the participating students, the participating faculty, and the program in general at this stage.

1. The college had unrealistically high expectations of the academic skills of the Scholars students. More specifically, while the students are diligent and motivated, many of them needed instruction in how to take essay exams, how to take lecture notes with any degree of sophistication, and how to conduct legitimate library research. This assessment was confirmed by both the faculty and the students. In a survey of student needs, nearly one-half of the students requested assistance in each of the following: notetaking (53%), taking essay exams (48%), research methods (45%), and study skills (44%). As a result, workshops are being developed to provide that training. On a long-term basis, the following changes are being considered to remedy the situation:

   a. The college is considering expanding the Scholars Program entrance requirements to include a writing sample and/or a minimum SAT score in addition to a prescribed GPA.

   b. The college is also considering a sequencing of the core curriculum to require completion of freshman composition and a techniques of research course prior to enrolling in the balance of the core curriculum.

2. A significant number of students in the program were not eligible for freshman composition. However, the rate was comparable to the freshman class at UC. As mentioned above, future students may be restricted until they complete freshman composition.

3. The students are very directed and motivated. However, this focus frequently causes a student preoccupation with grades rather than with learning.

4. The current student population in the Scholars Program appears to be reluctant to commit time to program activities outside of class time. While the students are responsive to such activities when the importance of them is explained, they do not readily respond in the absence of explanation. This reluctance may be a product of excessive commitments on student time—particularly since 48% of the students stated a need for assistance in budgeting their time between school, work and other activities.

5. Since part of the educational wealth of the community college is the heterogeneity of the student population, the Scholars Program needs to make more deliberate recruiting efforts to reflect the characteristics of the college. In addition to ethnic differences, the heterogeneity of the program must also reflect age differences and cultural differences.

6. Most students were excited about being part of the inauguaral class in the Scholars Program. However, there were a few students who became impatient with the delays necessary to resolve unforeseen problems.

7. Providing 125 students with very personalized support services that are coordinated with five universities was a logistical nightmare during the first semester. The college was successful because of the extraordinary efforts of the two faculty coordinators. It is interesting to note that when students were asked which college services and activities were of greatest concern or interest to them, 71% picked library service. Even though they could pick as many activities as they wished, no other activity received more than 50% selection.

8. Coordination of the services and articulation of the core curriculum with the partner universities, along with internal integration of the program, has required an extensive time commitment on the part of the coordinators and the core curriculum faculty. While all of the participants have been enthusiastic, the college needs to be sure that in time that enthusiasm is not extinguished by excessive volunteerism.

9. The faculty-to-faculty dialogues are helping to crystalize accurate perceptions about the academic rigor and quality of instruction at all of the partner institutions. In time, this improved understanding will lead to an increased mutual respect and the joint development of ideals for lower division education.

10. At times, the Scholars Program poses a philosophical dilemma for the instructors. That is, they are not sure whether to teach in a manner that will maximize the chance of upper division success or to teach in a manner which will maximize learning.

11. The Scholars Program has provided a growth experience for faculty, as well as students, by requiring faculty to reflect on their teaching process.

12. The core curriculum experience has engendered a feeling of comraderie among and between participating faculty and students.

13. The core curriculum needs greater integration—possibly through the pairing of core curriculum courses.

14. A number of necessary and significant research projects are now possible because an experimental group of "UC Eligible" students has been created and longitudinal cooperation has been established. This research should provide useful observations that can help the educational process at all participating institutions and provide directions for the next alternative learning environment.

CONCLUSION

The Santa Monica College Scholars Program appears to be a program which, after experiencing a reasonable evolutionary process, will succeed in accomplishing the stated hopes of the college. Clearly, the nature of the modifications in the program over the next few years are not predetermined but they will probably tend to reflect the assessments described in the previous section. Furthermore, the college will not be able to document the attainment of the program goals for at least another three years. Nevertheless, the college believes that the evidence to date leads one to predict a successful program.

The Scholars Program obviously provides numerous tangible benefits to participating students, participating faculty and the college. These benefits have been well described in the report and provide the cornerstone for the Scholars Program being successful. While these program characteristics by themselves may be sufficient for making the program a worthwhile endeavor, there are three additional factors which help make this program a model for future efforts to strengthen postsecondary education.

The first factor to be considered is the basis and nature of the relationship among the participating institutions in the Scholars Program. All six of the participating colleges and universities recognized that efforts to achieve excellence in lower division education is a common goal. Furthermore, all participants recognized that the success of the Scholars Program would benefit all of the participating institutions in that it would result in improved student performance at the upper division level. While such recognitions seem simplistic, they are significant because they move postsecondary relationships from the level of competition to the level of partnership. The feature of partnership is important because it reflects an equal commitment to success from all of the participants. That commitment is a necessary ingredient for excellence in education.

The second factor is that the Scholars Program provides an alternative learning process for students. This core curriculum does not substitute for the traditional program but rather provides students with a different learning environment. The environment of the Scholars Program is not ideal for all students nor all members of the faculty. However, learning and teaching are sufficiently complex that institutions must continually develop alternative educational processes. By offering choices, the institution can maximize teaching abilities and student learning through providing appropriate environments for different teaching styles and learning styles.

Finally, the effort to create the Scholars Program has merit even if the program does not achieve all of the stated hopes. A sincere effort on the part of the college to enhance the transfer program underscores the institution's commitment to that element of the college's mission. Good faith efforts such as the Scholars Program help to bolster faculty morale and demonstrate to external observers the serious intent of the institution to achieve excellence in education.

The Scholars Program is one attempt to enhance the transfer function at the college. It is not perfect, nor is it a panacea. It is simply the first of many efforts that will be made by Santa Monica College to improve lower divison education.

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